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ABSTRACT

Drug and alcohol abuse remains one of the most serious problems facing our society today. This study proposed that expected consequences of resisting peer pressure to drink alcohol may be important influences on actual drinking behavior and focused on describing these expectations. Sixth-graders (N=70) were presented with a hypothetical dilemma involving peer pressure to drink beer and asked to provide a strategy for dealing with the friend and expectations for the friend's response and the situation outcome. Strategy success was defined as being resistant to pressure to drink, while minimizing distancing from peers. The majority of subjects were able to generate some form of a response to peer pressure to drink that was an expression of a refusal. However, the simple "Just Say No" response was judged by raters as less likely to be successful in handling the drinking dilemma based on the criteria of resisting the pressure to drink while minimizing any distancing or alienation from friends. "No" responses that were accompanied by additional explanations or communications which helped to ease the air of conflict with the peer or which sought to persuade the peer of the reasons behind the decision were associated with more positive expectations regarding both the friend's response and the outcome of the situation. Girls had more positive expectations than did boys for situation outcomes. (Author/ABL)

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Sixth-Graders' Expressed Attitudes Toward Alcohol Use And Expected Peer Responses

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ABSTRACT

This study proposed that expected consequences of resisting peer pressure to drink alcohol may be important influences on actual drinking behavior and focused on describing these expectations.

Seventy sixth-graders were presented a hypothetical dilemma involving peer pressure to drink alcohol (beer) and asked to provide a strategy for dealing with the friend and expectations for the friend's response and the situation outcome. Responses were coded for degree of positive expectations and success likelihood of strategy. Strategy success was defined as being resistant to pressure to drink, while minimizing distancing from peers.

Interrelationships among Strategies, Expected Friend Responses, and Expected Situation Outcomes were described and relationships to social-cognitive skill, self-perceived social skills, and self-esteem examined.

Sixth-Graders' Expressed Attitudes Toward Alcohol Use And Expected Peer Responses

Despite extensive nation wide efforts (e.g., " Just Say No" campaign), drug and alcohol abuse remains one of the most serious problems facing our society today. Alarmingly, there is evidence that the problem is getting worse (Eiseman, Wingard, & Huba, 1984) and that the average age of initiation of substance use is decreasing (Keyes & Block, 1984). Over ninety percent of a group of fourteen year olds reported they had tried alcohol, some as early as the fifth grade (Keyes & Block, 1984), while fifty-one percent of a group of sixth graders reported experimentation with alcohol and 14% described greater use (Gersick, Grady, & Snow, 1988). In 1986, a national report stated that 100,000 ten and eleven year olds get drunk at least once a week, usually on beer and wine, and 3.3 million teenagers have serious drinking problems (The National Council on Alcoholism, 1986).

Interventions with student populations have evolved from early attempts to use information to educate and persuade youth as to the intra- and interpersonal qualities (e.g., self-esteem, anxiety, obedience, loneliness), to more recent efforts to enhance the cognitive skills thought to be integral to good decision-making about substance use (Gersick, et al., 1988).

Mixed results of such programs have failed to

unequivocally reveal the integral components leading to substance use (and conversely, keys to effective interventions). For instance, one program was successful in promoting increases in cognitive decision-making skills, but actual substance use was not affected (Gersick, et al., 1988). Likewise, the majority of knowledge and attitude based interventions have shown a significant effect on knowledge level and attitudes toward alcohol, but only modest or insignificant effects on alcohol use (Forney, Forney, & Ripley, 1988). Nevertheless, researchers continue to stress the respondent's own attitudes or personal standards, plus the number of alcohol-using friends as the factors exerting the greatest influence on adolescent alcohol use.

The well documented inconsistent link between attitudes and behavior (Sherrod, 1982; Wicker, 1969) may help explain the mixed results of attitude focused programs on actual alcohol use. Even in a questionnaire format, twice as many sixth graders indicated they would join friends in the use of substances than had previously expressed approval of such behavior (Reid, Martinson, & Weaver, 1987). This complex but important influence of the peer context on both attitudes and behavior regarding alcohol use points to a need to look beyond the simple variable of number of alcohol using friends to examine the actual mechanisms involved in this peer influence.

The concept of behavioral intention accommodates both the role of attitudes and the salience of having substance

using friends in the etiology of drinking behavior. Behavioral intention is the immediate antecedent of behavior and includes the sum of the individual's attitude toward performing a particular act in a given situation with respect to a given object, plus the influence of the social environment on behavior (Wolford & Swisher, 1986). Anticipated consequences, then, are thought to influence the behavioral expression of an attitude.

This study proposes that the expectancies held for the types of responses from friends and for situation outcomes play an important role in the actual behavior expressed by early adolescents. Especially when there are discrepancies between attitudes and actual behavior in a peer group setting, expected friend responses may be a key component in predicting resilience to peer pressure.

Thus, it appears a closer look at the role of the peer context is warranted. Peer-group affiliations are almost essential to healthy identity development in adolescence and peer pressures become the price of group membership (Clasen & Brown, 1985). This particular vulnerability of early adolescence was reflected in an important developmental shift between fifth and sixth grades, seen in a study in which children showed significant increases in conformity to peer pressure and in positive attitudes toward substance use (Pisano & Rooney, 1988). The increased vulnerability to peer pressure reflects the heightened importance of the peer group and social relations during this developmental stage. Both

peer normative expectations and reinforcement have been associated with substance use (Reid, et al., 1987)

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the types of peer responses that sixth-graders expect to encounter after expressing resistance to pressure to drink alcohol. A second objective is to examine the types of strategies proposed to deal with the friend and the expected outcomes for the situation. A third objective is to examine the relationships among types of strategies, expected peer responses, and outcomes, and measures of self-esteem, social skills, and social-cognitive skill.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects for this study were 70 (37 males, 33 females) Caucasian sixth-graders, from middle to upper-middle class families,participating in a larger, on-going project (The Family Peer Process Project, Cooper & Carlson, 1986).

Procedures

Research assistants collected the self-report and interview data during an after-school session with the subjects. The adolescents' self -esteem was measured using the Global Self-Worth and Social Competence subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter,1985). Self-perceived social skills were measured by the Empathy, Assertiveness and Expression of Feelings subscales of the

Global Skills Scale for Children (Harter & Thompson, 1985). A measure of social-cognitive developmental level was obtained using an adaptation from Selman's Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies Interview and coding scheme (Schultz, Yeates, & Selman, 1988).

In a structured interview, subjects were presented with a hypothetical dilemma in which the protagonist is pressured by a friend to drink beer at a party (Figure 1). After the dilemma was presented, a series of questions and probes were used by the interviewer to elicit the subject's suggestion of a "good" strategy for dealing with the situation and expectations for the friend's response and for the outcome for the situation. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

After content analysis of the responses, categories for each response dimension were developed. Eight strategy categories, seven friend response categories, and nine outcome categories captured the variety of responses obtained. Expected friend response and expected outcome categories were then rank ordered based on degree of positiveness. The eight strategy categories were rank ordered based on degree of probable success in handling the drinking dilemma. Success was evaluated based on two criteria: resisting the pressure to drink and minimizing any distancing or alienation from the friend or peer group. (See Figures 2-4 for ordered lists of categories with definitions and examples).

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Each subject's responses were then coded for strategy, expected friend response, and expected outcome for the situation. In addition, each subject's responses were coded Yes/No for the following categories as to whether or not: 1) Ridicule was expected from the friend, 2) Anger was expected from the friend, Self-Reinforcement was used, and 4) Outcome was seen as Contingent on the Quality of the Friend.

Coder reliability was high-- average percent agreement for strategies, peer responses, and outcomes was 97%. In order to correct for the high probability of chance agreement, the Yes/No coding was evaluated with Cohen's kappas (Cohen, 1979). For Ridicule, kappa=.76, for Anger, kappa=.91, for Self-Reinforcement, kappa=.74, and for Contingent on Friend, kappa=.79.

Because the responses to the dilemma had previously been coded for social-cognitive developmental level, it was decided to include these scores in the analyses. These scores were based on Selman's Interpersonal Negotiations Strategies Interview (Schultz, et al., 1988) and are reported more fully elsewhere (Spradling, Ayers-Lopez, Carlson, & Cooper, 1989). These scores reflect four progressively more mature underlying levels of social perspective coordination, ranging from impulsive to mutual/collaborative.

RESULTS

Category Frequencies

Frequencies for categories are reported in Tables 1-4. Approximately one third of the sample expected exclusively negative responses from friends (Table 1). No significant gender differences were found for the rank ordered responses. Nearly one quarter of the subjects described their expected friend's response to be positive or negative, in an exclusive "either/or" fashion. About 13% foresaw a negative initial response from the friend, but continued with a recovery of some sort (e.g., the friend will get angry, but later will understand). Only 14.3% expected a completely positive response to their expressed refusal to drink the beer. These frequencies of expected responses from friends differ quite a bit from the proportions of nondrinking adolescents in another study that reported experiencing Praise (Positive Reinforcement)- 4%, Nothing Special (Neutral)- 77%, and Put Down (Punishment)- 19% from friends in drinking situations (Stumphauzer, 1983).

Gender differences were seen for expected outcome for the situation, Tau c = .30, $< .02$ (Table 2). Nearly half of the boys expected purely negative outcomes, while only a quarter of the girls held such expectations. Approximately a fourth of both boys and girls described outcomes as possibly being positive or negative, in exclusive either/or terms. Twice as many boys as girls expected an initial negative occurrence that was followed by a positive resolution, 18.9%,

9.1%. And finally, the gender difference was again highlighted by only 10.8% of the boys expecting the more positive outcomes, in contrast to 36.4% of the girls who did so.

Chi-square analyses revealed no significant gender differences for any of the four Yes/No categories. The expectation of any ridicule from friends was held by 41.4% of the sample (Table 3). This widespread expectation is consistent with research that reports concern about social non-conformity is more frequent in preadolescence than in late adolescence and may be related to the finding that children at these ages begin to respond to peers' conventional transgressions with ridicule (Nucci & Nucci, 1982), where it acts to achieve conformity.

Anger from the friend was only expected by 21.4% and approximately the same proportion of subjects evaluated the outcome in terms of the quality of the friend (e.g., "If she is a good friends, she'll understands. If they're not good friends, then she might get mad"). The inclusion in the response of some use of self-reinforcement was seen in only about a fourth of the sample. This is less than the 40% of a sample of nondrinking adolescents who reported that they felt Proud about themselves for not drinking (Stumphauzer, 1983). In Stumphauzer's study, 55% reported they felt Nothing Special (Neutral), while 5% reportedly felt Embarrassed about not drinking. It is important to note in comparing these results, that Stumphauzer's questions were directly asked of

nondrinking adolescents of their actual experiences, while the present study more indirectly tapped these reactions in a mixed sample through a hypothetical situation.

An examination of the rank ordered categories of strategies revealed a significant gender difference with boys clearly overrepresented in the very low success categories--no girls reported drinking, withdrawing, or simply acting without communicating as a way of dealing with the drinking dilemma(Table 4). In addition, girls used more of the higher level strategies in dealing with their friends, Tau c = .27, $p < .02$.

This difference was specifically due to the nearly threefold use by girls of Stating Will Plus Buffer as compared to the use by boys. Girls were much more likely to use a strategy which allowed them to refuse the alcoholic drink without distancing themselves from their peers (e.g., "No, I don't want any, I'm allergic to beer"). This type of strategy was not among the ones that were reported by Stumphauzer's sample (1983), which largely reported using strong, assertive statements like the ones coded in this study as simply States Will ("No, I don't want any"), or States Will with an Evaluative Stance ("No,, I don't like beer"; "No, it's wrong") which come closest to describing simply "Just Saying No."

Stumphauzer's sample did report using strategies comparable to this study's Transient Will ("I'm not in the mood"; "Maybe later, I just ate"), but he described them as

evasive, whereas this study emphasized their success in not only resisting the pressure to drink, but doing so without distancing the adolescents from their friends.

Finally, approximately 40% of the early adolescents in this study offered a strategy equivalent to "Just Say No" in a simple statement of will ("No"; "No, I don't want any"). While these subjects did express their desire not to drink, this strategy, and States Will plus Evaluative Stance, were seen as more confrontive in dealing with the friend. Judges rating strategies for effectiveness in both resisting the beer and in staying connected to the peer felt that these strategies would highlight the difference between the two friends and there would be a sense of unresolved tension due to the explicit non-conformity. Interestingly, nearly half the girls used the simple will statement which was judged as more confrontive or challenging. Stumphauzer reported that a few of the girls in his sample appeared to give more aggressive replies (Stumphauzer, 1983).

Comparisons Among Measures

For all subjects, the use of more successful strategies was significantly associated with more positive expectations of responses from friends, Tau c = .19, $p < .02$; and with more positive outcomes for the situation, Tauc= .16, $p < .04$. Expectations of more positive peer responses were highly associated with expectations of positive outcomes for the situation, Tau c = .53, $p < .000$ (Table 5).

Girls used more successful strategies than did boys, Tau c = .27, p <.02, that is, girls tended to use strategies that were judged more likely to resist peer pressure to drink, while minimizing any distancing or alienation from their peers. Girls also expected more positive outcomes for the situation than did boys, Tau c = .30, p < .02. There was no significant association between sex and expected friend response. An inspection of the frequency cross-tabulation tables suggest that while girls and boys had similar expectations for how their friends would react, in terms of the overall outcome for the situation, girls tended to use more Self-Reinforcement, while boys were overrepresented in the Gives in and Drinks and the Withdrawal categories of expected outcomes.

More positive expected responses from friends were also related to higher social-cognitive skill (Table 6). Those who expected that their resistance to pressure to drink alcohol would be met with more positive responses from their friend also displayed higher interpersonal skill reflecting the coordination of social perspectives. Not surprisingly, successful strategies were associated with higher social-cognitive skill level, Eta = .57, p < .01. The evaluation that a strategy would be likely to resist peer pressure to drink while minimizing any distancing or alienation from peers was related to a higher developmental level on a measure of social-cognitive competence that reflects increasing levels of social perspective coordination.

The use of more successful strategies was not significantly associated with any of the self-perceived social skills or measures of self-esteem, although there was a trend for a positive relationship with self-perceived Expression of Feelings skill, Eta = .49, $p < 10$. More positive expectations regarding the friend's response were significantly associated with higher self-perceived Social Acceptance, a domain of self-esteem, Eta = .27, $p < .05$ (Table 6).

More positive expectations regarding the outcome to the situation were associated with higher self-perceived Assertiveness skill, Eta = .32, $p < .05$; higher self-perceived Expression of Feelings skill, Eta = .35, $p < .05$ (Table 6). No significant relationships were found with self-perceived Global Self-Esteem, supporting Harter's notion of the validity of different domains of self-esteem (Harter, 1985).

Analyses failed to reveal any interdependence among the four Yes/No coded categories, nor any relationships of these categories to gender or to social-cognitive skill. Analyses of variance failed to obtain significant differences based on whether the evaluation of the outcome was seen as contingent on the quality of the friend, but there was a trend for the Use of Self-Reinforcement to be associated with higher self-perceived Expression of Feelings skill, $F=3.17$, $p < .08$.

Both Expected Ridicule from friend and Expected Anger from friend were significantly, though differentially, related to self-perceived Assertiveness skill. Expectation of Ridicule was associated with higher self-perceived Assertiveness, $F=4.52$, $p < .04$, while expectation of Anger was associated with associated with lower self-perceived Assertiveness skill, $F=4.01$, $p < .05$.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR RESULTS

1. More positive expectations for friends' response and for situation outcome were associated with the use of strategies that were judged as more likely to successfully resist peer pressure to drink without distancing or alienating oneself from peers.
2. More positive expected friend responses and higher success rated strategies were significantly associated with higher social-cognitive interpersonal skill level.
3. More positive outcome expectancies were associated with higher self-perceived assertiveness skill, higher expression of feelings skill, and higher self-esteem in the domain of social acceptance.
4. Expectation of ridicule from friend was associated with higher self-perceived assertiveness, while expectation of anger from friend was associated with lower self-perceived assertiveness.
5. Girls had more positive expectations than did boys for situation outcomes and described strategies judged as more

likely to resist peer pressure to drink while minimizing any distancing or alienation from peers.

DISCUSSION

It appears that the message to "Just Say No" has been heard by this group of early adolescents. The majority of the sample was able to generate some form of a response to peer pressure to drink that was an expression of a refusal. However, the simple "Just Say No" response was judged by raters as less likely to be successful in handling the drinking dilemma based on the criteria of resisting the pressure to drink while minimizing any distancing or alienation from friends. "No" responses that were accompanied by additional explanations or communications which helped to ease the air of conflict with the peer by alluding to allergies, moods, etc., or which sought to persuade the peer of the reasons behind the decision were not only judged by raters as more likely to succeed based on the criteria mentioned above, but were also associated with more positive expectations regarding both the friend's response and the outcome to the situation.

Given that expected consequences can strongly influence behavior, contributing to the often found discrepancy between expressed attitudes and subsequent behavior in a peer context, this study suggests that it may not be enough to teach our youth to "Just Say No." Particularly for those entering early adolescence, when peaking social acceptance

needs result in significant increases in conformity to peer pressure, we may need to develop interventions which move beyond teaching cognitive decision-making skills to those which help develop social-cognitive skills. It is suggested that interpersonal skills which will enable these youth to assert themselves and resist peer pressure to use drugs or alcohol, without distancing or alienating themselves from the peer group they so highly value, are the tools which may prove most successful.

Figure 1

Drinking Dilemma

Peter/Lisa is at a party to which some kids have brought beer. Peter/Lisa doesn't like this too much and feels uncomfortable. His/Her friend grabs a couple of cans of beer and came up to drink them with him/her, but Peter/Lisa doesn't like beer.

Figure 2

Definitions and Examples of Strategies Employed by Early Adolescents in the Drinking Dilemma

Drinks: The protagonist drinks alcohol.
Examples: Go ahead and drink.
Just take a few sips.

Withdraws: The protagonist physically removes himself/herself from the situation.
Examples: I would just leave.
He should just get out of there.

Acts Out Will: The protagonist acts on his/her desire to not drink. No verbal communication is used.
Examples: If he doesn't want to then he just shouldn't drink.
Don't do it.

States Will: The protagonist verbally asserts his/her desire to not drink.
Examples: Just tell him no. Just say no.
Could just tell her no...

States Will Plus Evaluative Stance: The protagonist states position with a personal enduring stance or attitude.
Examples: ...doesn't want to 'cause she doesn't like beer.

States Will Plus a Buffer: The protagonist states desire to not drink beer along with a reason that is out of the protagonist's control.

Examples: ...tell her she doesn't like it because it makes her sick.
...tell her friend she's allergic...

Transient Will: Protagonist does not present his/her desire to not drink beer as an enduring stance.

Examples: ...ask for a coke, tell her shes' not in the mood for a beer...

States Will Plus An Attempt to Persuade: Protagonist states his/her desire to drink beer and attempts to persuade his/her friend to do likewise.

Examples: Tell her she doesn't want to drink beer and that she shouldn't do it either.

Figure 3

Definitions and Examples of Outcomes Expected by Early Adolescents in the Drinking Dilemma

Gives In and Drinks

Example: He would go ahead and take a little bit.

End of Friendship

Example: They probably wouldn't be friends.

Permanent Damage to Friendship

Example: Peter and his friend wouldn't be as good of friends...

Negative Outcome Expected

Example: Her friends might think she is a chicken.

Either Positive or Negative Outcome

Example: Well, they may tell Peter to go away or they might understand.

Negative Reaction followed by a Positive Response

Example: The friend would be mad at first but then he may see that it's okay for Peter not to drink.

Neutral Outcome

Example: No big deal... nothing really would happen.

Positive Outcome

Example: Lisa's friend would understand.

Respondent Would Feel Good About Self Despite Friend's Negative Response

Example: Peter would feel good about himself 'cause he didn't drink the beer and he knows he did the best thing.

Figure 4

Definitions and Examples of Expected Peer Responses in the Drinking Dilemma

Negative/Rejects: Friend rejects protagonist.
Example: They might just tell Peter to go away.

Negative/Ridicules: Friend makes fun of or teases pro-tagonist.
Example: Lisa's friends would probably call her a chicken and go naah... naah...

Neutral: Friend doesn't really react to protagonist's reaction towards the beer.
Example: He really wouldn't say anything to Peter. It wouldn't be a big thing.

Rebounds/ Negative then Recovery: Friend would react negatively to protagonist's decision initially but would later express a positive reaction.
Example: Her friend might be mad at first but then she would understand.

Positive/Accepts: Friend expresses an acceptance of the protagonist's stance.
Example: Lisa's friend would say it was okay.

Positive/Understands: Friend expresses an understanding for the protagonist's stance.
Example: Her friends would understand why she doesn't want to drink.

Table -1

Percentages of Early Adolescents' Anticipated Peer Responses by Rank Ordered Categories

Rank/Peer Response	Males	Females	Total
1. Negative/Rejects	29.7	24.2	27.1
2. Negative/Ridicules	18.9	15.2	17.1
3. Neutral	5.4	3.8	4.3
4. Positive or Negative	21.6	27.3	24.3
5. Negative then Recovery	16.2	9.1	12.9
6. Positive/Accepts	5.4	12.1	8.6
7. Positive/ Understands	2.7	9.1	5.7

Table -2

Percentages of Early Adolescents' Expectations For Outcome by Rank Ordered Categories

Rank/Outcome	Males	Females	Total
1. Gives in & drinks	5.4	0.0	2.9
2. End of friendship	13.5	9.1	11.4
3. Permanent damage to friendship	5.4	6.1	5.7
4. Negative outcome	24.3	9.1	17.1
5. Either positive or negative outcome	21.6	30.3	25.7
6. Negative reaction followed by positive reaction	18.9	9.1	14.3
7. Neutral outcome	2.7	9.1	5.7
8. Positive outcome	2.7	15.2	8.6
9. Feels good about self despite peer's negative response	5.4	12.1	8.6

Table -3

Percentages of Early Adolescents' Responses Which Include Expected Ridicule, Expected Anger, Self-Reinforcement, and Evaluation of the Friend

Category	Yes	No
Expects Ridicule From Friend	41.4	58.6
Expects Anger From Friend	21.4	78.6
Uses Self-Reinforcement	25.7	74.3
Outcome is Contingent On the Quality of the Friend	22.9	77.1

Table -4

Percentages of Strategies Suggested by Early Adolescents by Rank Ordered Categories

Rank/Strategy	Males	Females	Total
1. Drinks	2.7	0.0	1.4
2. Withdraws	16.2	0.0	8.6
3. Acts Out Will	8.1	0.0	4.3
4. States Will	32.4	45.5	38.6
5. States Will Plus Evaluative Stance	27.0	33.3	30.0
6. States Will Plus Buffer	5.4	15.2	10.0
7. Transient Will	5.4	3.0	3.0
8. States Will Plus An Attempt to Persuade	2.7	3.0	2.9

Table -5

Relationships Among Success Ranking of Strategy, Degree of Positive Situation Outcome Expected, and Degree of Positive Response Expected from Friend

	Expected Outcome	Friend's Response
Strategy	.16*	.19*
Expected Outcome		.53***

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1 Tau-c values of association.

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table -6

Relationships Among Success Ranking of Strategy, Degree of Positive Situation Outcome Expected, Degree of Positive Response of Friend Expected, Social-Cognitive Skill, Self-Perceived Social Skills, and Self Competence.

	Strategy Level	Expected Outcome	Friend's Response
Social-Cognitive Skill Level	.57**	.47	.52***
Self Perceived Empathy Skill	.27	.23	.20
Self-Perceived Assertiveness Skill	.24	.26	.32*
Self-Perceived Expression of Feelings Skill	.49+	.35*	.23
Self-Perceived Social Acceptance	.21	.37*	.27*
Self-Perceived Global Self-Worth	.33	.23	.35

1 Eta values of association

+p < 10 *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

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